

NATIVE AMERICAN LABOR IN THE MISSIONS



Original mural by Anton Refregier. Photograph by David Bacon, Courtesy of California Federation of Teachers.

Mission labor is depicted in this U.S. Treasury Section of Fine Arts-sponsored mural, preserved in the Rincon Annex post office building on Mission Street in San Francisco.

Under Spanish and the first decade of Mexican rule in what became California, most of the labor in the state's 21 missions was performed by Native Americans. They were brought into the missions, often by force, to be converted to Catholicism. There they were expected to learn trades such as blacksmithing, and to work in agriculture and domestic activities. The immediate and dramatic forced cultural and linguistic changes resulted in many rebellions. Many Native Americans died from European diseases and as a result of coerced mission labor.

FOREIGN MINERS' LICENSE TAX



The California gold rush drew people of all nationalities, ethnicities, and races to the diggings. Some white, native-born Americans bitterly resented the competition of miners from foreign countries, and sometimes drove them forcibly from the mines. They also pressured the state legislature to exclude foreign miners from mining in California. On April 13, 1850, the legislature responded and passed the Foreign Miners' License Tax, which provided that all miners who were not native-born citizens of the United States, or who had not become citizens under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, were to pay a tax of \$20 a month to work in the mines. The Foreign Miners' Tax law was amended several times and eventually declared unconstitutional in 1870.

This image is one of the earliest known views showing Chinese mining for gold.

THE EIGHT HOUR DAY



In 1867, San Francisco's early unions built a strong movement for a standard eight-hour day. Ship and steamboat joiners, plasterers, bricklayers, laborers, stone cutters, lathers, riggers, gas fitters, house carpenters and house painters had all achieved eight-hour contracts by February 1868 when an eight-hour day law was signed by the Governor. A huge torchlight procession in San Francisco celebrated passage of the first state eight-hour law in the country, as shown in this mural panel by Anton Refregier. However, the law lacked enforcement mechanisms, and when a national economic depression hit California in the 1870s, the eight-hour day law was effectively rendered meaningless as employers increased working hours.



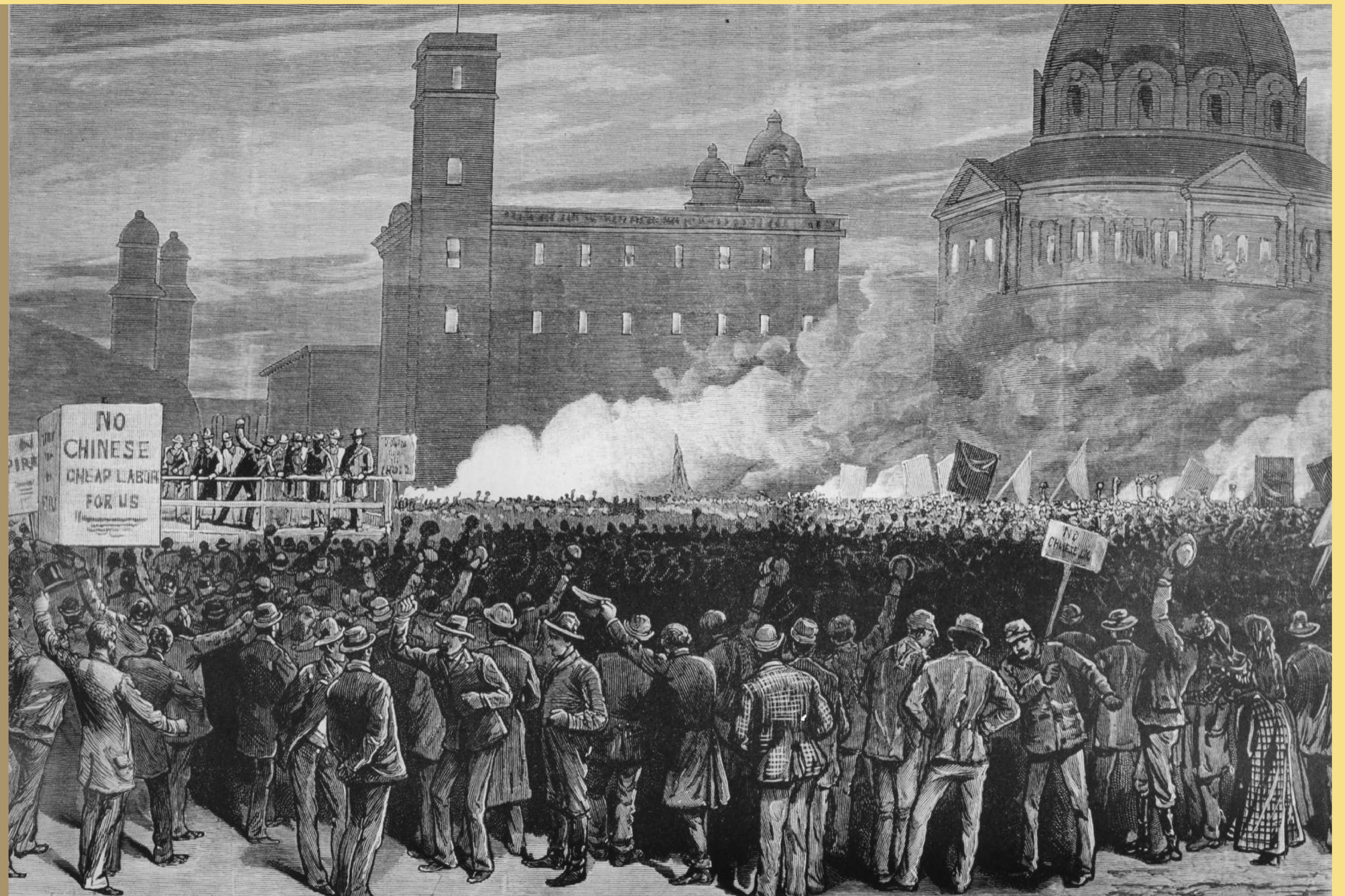
Photo by David Bacon. Courtesy of California Federation of Teachers.

This protest in Oakland was organized by the California Labor Federation.

The 1938 federal law governing overtime pay, the Fair Labor Standards Act, mandated time and a half pay after a 40-hour work week, and allowed states to pass daily overtime laws as well. California was among states with regulations allowing for time-and-a-half pay after eight hours of work daily. In 1997, the state's Industrial Welfare Commission overturned the daily overtime regulation, reducing many workers' take-home pay and sparking protests across the state. The rule was restored a few years later.

WORKINGMEN'S PARTY OF CALIFORNIA

In the 1870s, a significant part of San Francisco's workforce was composed of Chinese immigrants. Under the impact of a severe economic depression, workers suffered from high unemployment. White workers blamed unemployment and wage cuts on competition from Chinese workers and on the policies of the powerful Central Pacific Railroad. The Workingmen's Party of California was formed in the fall of 1877. Its platform called for controls on the power of the Central Pacific Railroad, free public education, a more equitable tax system, and deportation of Chinese immigrants. The party won numerous municipal offices in the 1878 elections, and sent a third of the delegates elected to the Sacramento convention that created a new state constitution in 1879. The fall of the party was as swift as its rise; by 1883 it was no longer in existence.



Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, March 20, 1880. Courtesy of San Francisco Public Library

On the right of the picture is the unfinished San Francisco City Hall, which was the site of numerous rallies.

WAGE EARNERS SUFFRAGE LEAGUE FLOAT

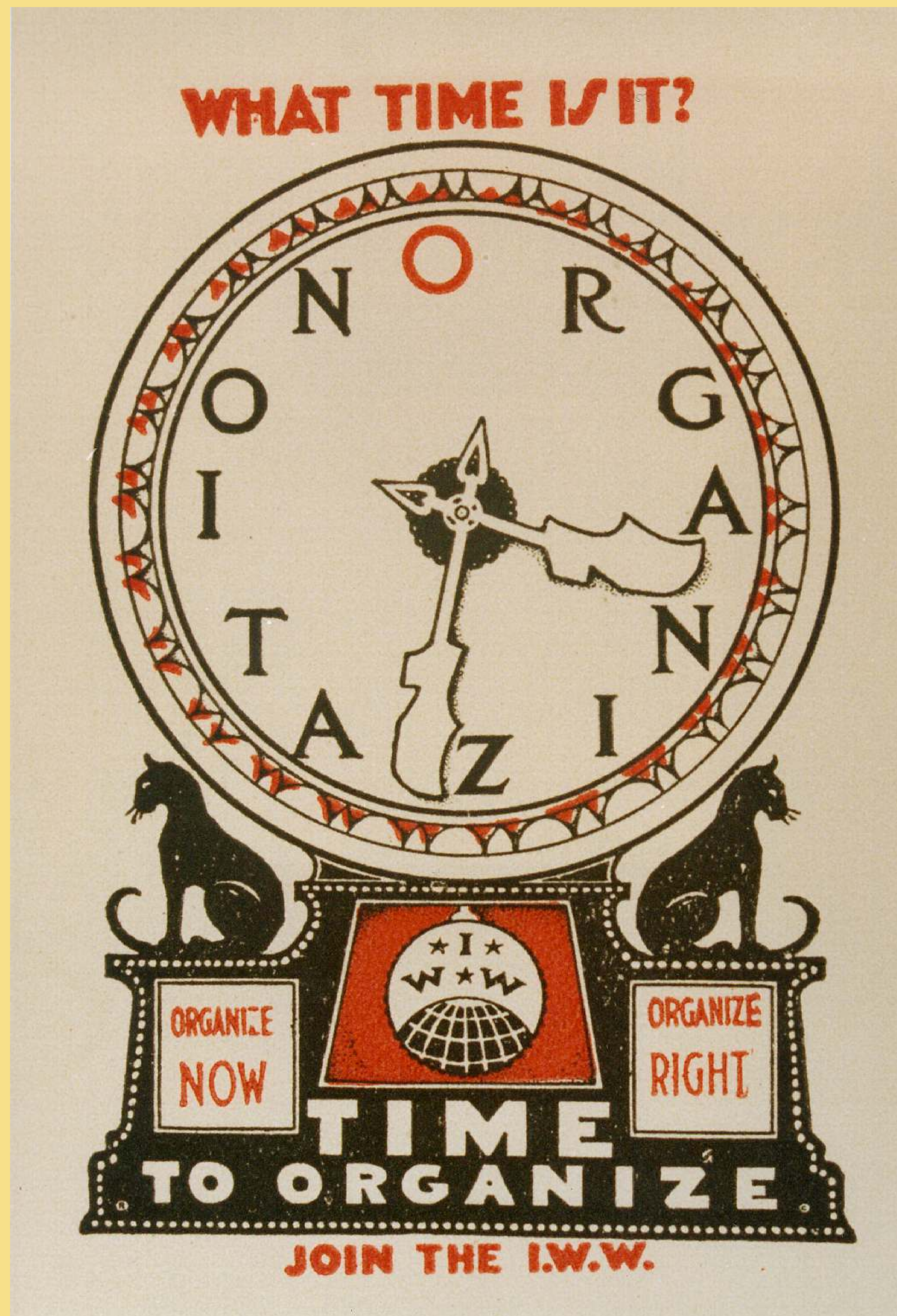


Courtesy of Huntington Library.

Wage Earners Suffrage League representatives are shown here in a Los Angeles labor parade.

Working women organized themselves to gain the vote in California. Waitresses, laundry workers, factory workers, and teachers were especially visible in California's suffrage campaign in 1910-1911. Labor-based organizations, such as the Wage Earners Suffrage League, engaged in highly visible public outreach activities at a time when women were not "supposed to" be public activists. WESL representatives worked hard to secure the support of unions and generally succeeded. In 1911, California became the sixth and largest state in the nation to approve women's suffrage when male voters approved a woman's right to vote.

WOBBLIES



Founded in 1905, the Industrial Workers of the World or “Wobblies” gained a base in California's fertile valleys, where conditions for farm workers often included bare subsistence wages, no sanitary facilities or water in the fields, and child labor. The IWW also built militant, although usually short-lived, organizations in the mining, timber, and maritime industries. Following passage of the California Criminal Syndicalism Act in 1919, many IWW leaders and activists were sent to prison under its provisions. This law was found to be unconstitutional forty years later.

The black cats and wooden shoes (sabot) symbols in this IWW poster advocate industrial sabotage, a message underlying “time to organize”.

1934 GENERAL STRIKE IN SAN FRANCISCO



Courtesy of the International Longshore and Warehouse Workers Union.

Striking longshoremen on the Embarcadero, July 1934.



Courtesy of the San Francisco Public Library.

Injured strikers, July 5, 1934.



Courtesy of the San Francisco Public Library.

Funeral march on Market Street, July 1934.



Courtesy of the San Francisco Public Library.

Harry Bridges speaking with striking longshoremen, July 1934.

In 1934, 15,000 longshoremen along the west coast struck when the owners refused to recognize their union or negotiate a contract. Soon some 6,000 members of the seafaring unions joined the strike. On July 3, San Francisco police were assigned to protect strikebreakers seeking to open the port. Thousands of workers battled the police and strikebreakers in a violent war in the streets. On July 5, striking longshoreman Howard Sperry and cook Nick Bordoise were killed on what became known as “Bloody Thursday.” In response, the Governor sent in the National Guard. Soon 25,000 workers participated in a silent funeral march up Market Street. This display of solidarity led to a four-day General Strike that involved over 100,000 workers, with the endorsement of sixty-three unions. The longshoremen eventually won union-run hiring halls, pay increases, and a thirty-hour work week. These events launched the leadership career of Harry Bridges, and set the stage for the founding of the Congress of Industrial Organizations on the west coast.



Courtesy of the International Longshore and Warehouse Workers Union

Upon settlement of the strike, sailors returned to work and burned the employment “fink books,” required by employers before the strike. Just right of the center, can be seen Andrew Furusest, Secretary Treasurer of the Sailors Union of the Pacific from 1891 to 1935.

UPTON SINCLAIR AND THE CAMPAIGN TO END POVERTY IN CALIFORNIA (EPIC)

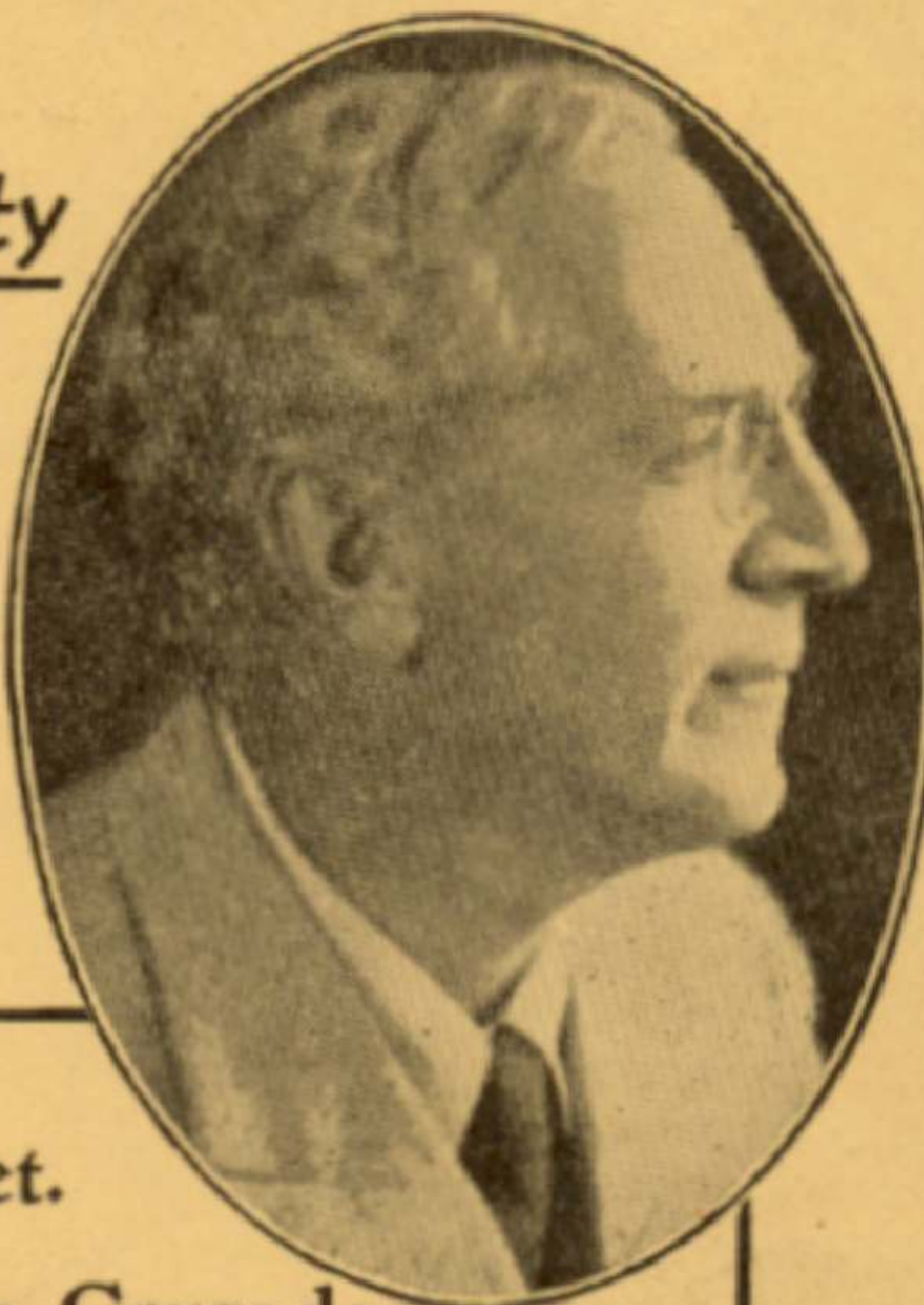
I, GOVERNOR OF CALIFORNIA

And How I Ended Poverty

A True Story of the Future

BY

UPTON SINCLAIR



This is not just a pamphlet.
This is the beginning of a Crusade.
A Two-Year Plan to make over a State.
To capture the Democratic primaries and
use an old party for a new job.
The EPIC plan:
(E)nd (P)overty (I)n (C)alifornia!

*The Best Selling Book in the History of California
150,000 in Four Months*

PRICE 20 CENTS

END POVERTY LEAGUE 1501 SOUTH GRAND AVE.
INCORPORATED LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
(ADDRESS ALL LETTERS AS ABOVE)

Following the great farm strikes of 1933-34 and the San Francisco general strike of 1934, popular discontent in California crystallized in the form of political action. Novelist and socialist Upton Sinclair launched his crusade to End Poverty in California (EPIC) as the core of his campaign for Governor. Sinclair's candidacy was endorsed by the California Federation of Labor. EPIC clubs were created around the state and thousands of Sinclair's pamphlets describing how to end poverty in California were sold. On August 28, 1934, Sinclair received more votes than all his rivals combined in the Democratic primary for governor. After a negative campaign, Republican Frank Merriam won the gubernatorial election with 49 percent of the vote.

THE CAMPAIGN FOR FAIR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

In the post-World War II era, racial discrimination prevented many non-whites from full access to decent employment. A coalition of unions, civil rights groups, and community organizations conducted a campaign for a Fair Employment Practices (FEP) law throughout the 1950s.

State legislators Byron Rumford and Augustus Hawkins (who was first elected to the state legislature as an EPIC candidate in 1934) carried FEP bills, which were defeated time and again. Local FEP committees leafleted outside stores that refused to hire minorities.



Courtesy of African American Museum and Library at Oakland.

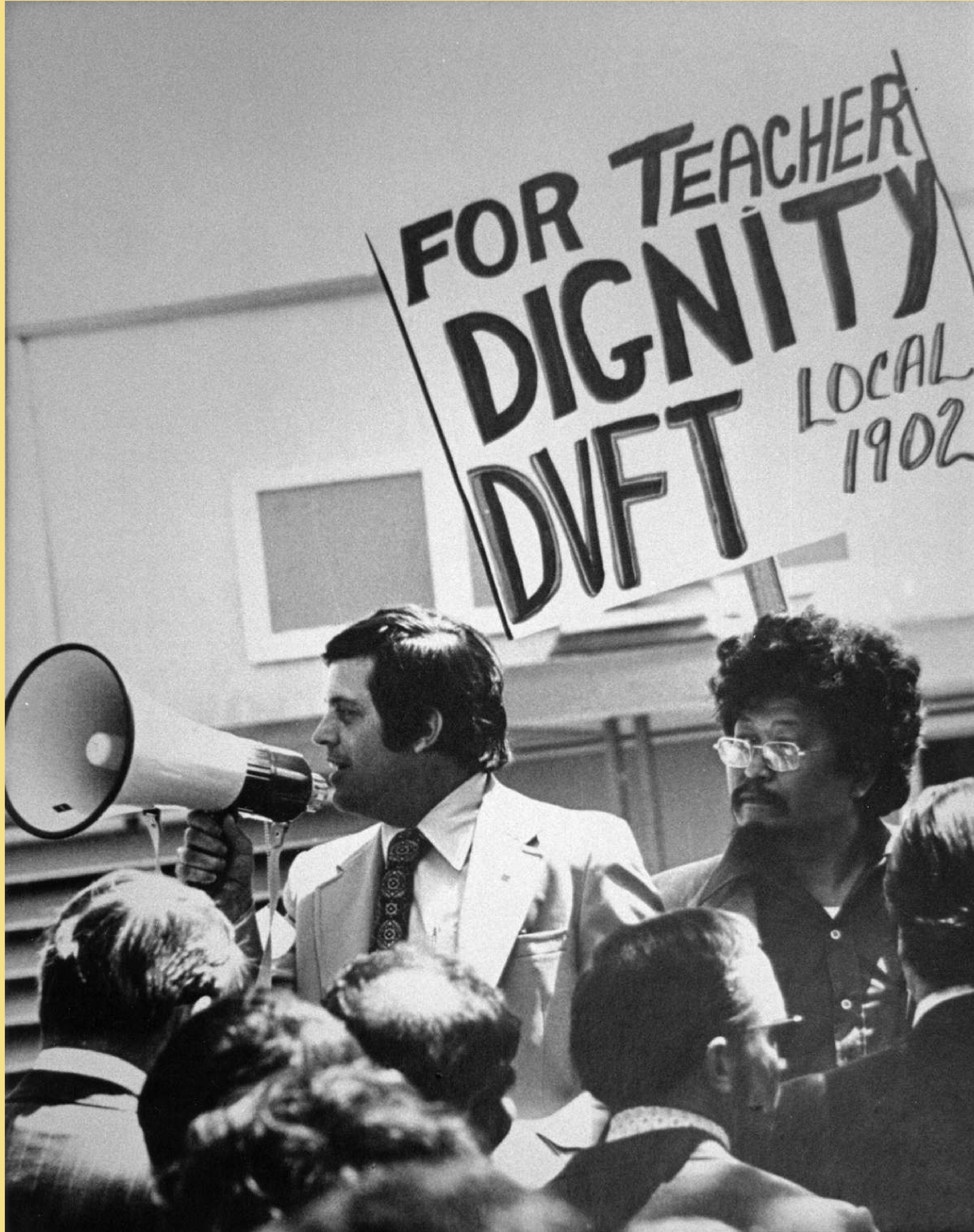
After his election, Governor Brown signed the Fair Employment Practices Act on April 16, 1959. Shown in this photograph are the leaders of the FEP coalition. First row, left to right: Senator Richard Richards; Senator George Miller; Senator Rumford; Governor Brown; Assemblyman Gus Hawkins. Second row, left to right: Bill Becker, Northern California Jewish Labor Committee; Neil Haggerty, Secretary-Treasurer, California State Federation of Labor; Nathaniel Colley, NAACP General Counsel; C.L. Dellums, Chair, California Committee for Fair Employment Practices and National VP, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; Max Mont, Southern California Jewish Labor Committee; and Franklin Williams, West Coast NAACP Executive Secretary.



Courtesy of Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research.

In the photograph displayed here, a local FEP action group prepares a giant "postcard" to the owner of the May Company in Los Angeles in the late 1950s.

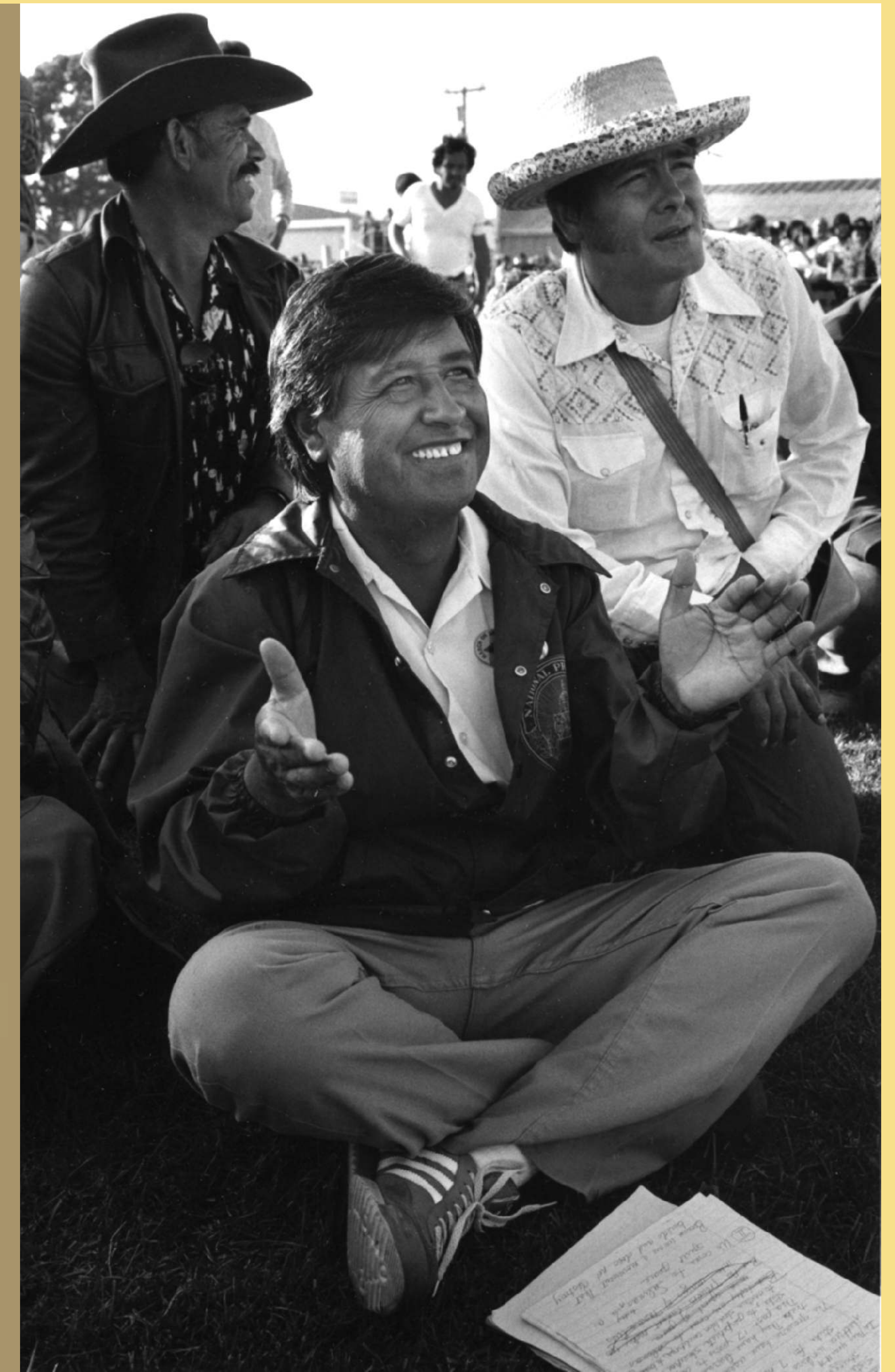
PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONISM



The sixties ushered in a new era of union activism, linked with the other social movements of the times. The civil rights, free speech, and anti-Vietnam war movements all had an impact on public sector workers, who had been left out of the provisions of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935. Militant tactics such as sit-ins, civil disobedience and mass demonstrations had proved effective for the social movements, and public sector unionists utilized similar tactics in their efforts to achieve a law allowing for public worker collective bargaining. By 1968, all California public workers except those in public education could bargain. Continuing action by public education employees brought passage of the state Educational Employment Relations Act in 1975 and the Higher Education Employee Relations Act in 1978.

In this photograph, California Federation of Teachers (CFT) president Raoul Teilhet (with bullhorn) rallies teachers in 1972, next to Kaz Mori, president of the Diablo Valley Federation of Teachers.

CESAR CHAVEZ AND THE UNITED FARM WORKERS



Photos by Pamela Harris, Courtesy of the California State Library.



Photo by Pamela Harris, Courtesy of the California State Library.

Farmworkers, like public sector workers, had been left out of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935, and possessed no legal right to strike or to collective bargaining. Valiant efforts to unionize throughout the twentieth century had left no lasting organization. Then the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO, and the National Farm Workers Association, led by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, merged to form the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee in 1965. In 1976 the legislature passed the Agricultural Labor Relations Act.

Photo by Pamela Harris, Courtesy of the California State Library.

These photographs show a march from King City to Salinas and the rally that followed in Salinas, in support of the 1979 UFW lettuce strike and boycott. The seated Cesar Chavez is pictured in the photograph to the right.